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Innovative program helps low-income parents find childcare on the Internet

DSHS employee honored for initiating partnership with Child Care Resources

Seattle, WA – Quality childcare is only a mouse-click away for low-income parents and case managers in King County.

Sylvia Young, the Department of Social and Health Services' regional contracts manager for King County, is being honored for helping initiate a state partnership with Child Care Resources, a not-for-profit childcare referral agency with offices in Seattle, Bellevue and Kent. The program makes it easy for participants in the state's welfare reform program, WorkFirst, to find licensed providers who will accept their state-provided childcare subsidies.

Young and DSHS will be honored during Child Care Resources' annual meeting Wednesday, June 6, at the Mt. Baker Community Club in Seattle.

"Young supports Child Care Resources by recognizing that a critical piece of helping families be able to work is ensuring they have safe, affordable, quality childcare. She has been instrumental in putting a contract in place that helps WorkFirst participants access our customized services," said Kim Klaffky, director of parent services at Child Care Resources.

More

Child Care Resources provides a searchable Internet database of licensed childcare providers. Case managers at DSHS' 12 Community Service Offices in King County use the online service to find providers that meet their clients' needs. DSHS expects to soon approve a contract that will make the partnership more permanent, Young said.

DSHS already contracts with Child Care Resources for other services. The organization's professional staff assists WorkFirst parents by finding childcare providers, contacting providers to determine whether they are accepting new children, and accompanying parents to licensed childcare programs to help them better determine the best provider for their needs. So far this year, 82 WorkFirst families have found childcare through the partnership with Child Care Resources.

Young said that before DSHS began contracting with Child Care Resources it was more time-consuming for WorkFirst parents and case managers in King County to find childcare.

"They hunted for providers in the phone book or used a list. They had to call each provider to inquire about services. Sometimes they forgot to ask an important question. With a database, you can enter the criteria you want and it searches for you," Young said. "Collaboration is the key to WorkFirst's success. DSHS' contract with Child Care Resources shows the benefits of partnering and technology."

DSHS's Licensed Childcare Information System offers additional resources to help parents select and monitor childcare providers. The system includes a Web site, www.dshs.wa.gov/childcareinfo, where parents can research a provider's licensing history and report issues and concerns about a childcare facility. Those searching for providers are connected to the Washington State Child Care Resource & Referral Network for information about referral agencies in their communities. A toll-free number, 1-866-48-CHECK (1-866-482-4325), offers the same information and connects parents to professionals who can offer further guidance.

WorkFirst helps families become self-sufficient by providing experience, training and support services needed to get a job, keep a job and move up a career ladder. About 139,000 participants have joined Washington's workforce since the program began in 1997. In King County, nearly 21,900 WorkFirst participants have gone to work since July 1998.

The state's welfare caseload has dropped by 43 percent in four years. Caseload reductions enabled the state to triple funds to help families pay for childcare.

For more information about WorkFirst, see the WorkFirst Web site at www.wa.gov/workfirst.

For more information about Child Care Resources, see its Web site at www.childcare.org.

For more information about the Licensed Childcare Information System, see its Web site at www.dshs.wa.gov/childcareinfo.